

Exhibit B

Morning Mix

Australian Jehovah's Witnesses protected over a thousand members accused of child abuse, report says

By Samantha Schmidt

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Over the course of about six decades, more than 1,000 members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were accused of sexually abusing Australian children, according to a new report. Victims were ordered to keep quiet. Not one of the alleged perpetrators were reported to the police.

Now, a royal commission in Australia has found the church demonstrated a "serious failure" to protect children from the risk of sexual abuse and relied on outdated policies and practices to respond to such allegations.

A [107-page-long report](#) released Monday detailed a number of ancient policies that exhibited what the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse referred to as a "serious lack of understanding of the nature of child sexual abuse."

One such practice, derived from scripture, requires church elders investigating incidents to secure a confession from the person accused or the testimony of two "credible" witnesses to the same incident, two witnesses to separate incidents of the same kind, or strong circumstantial evidence testified to by at least two witnesses. The accuser also has to justify his or her allegations to church elders, often in front of the alleged perpetrator.

The commission's findings were based on a close examination of the allegations — which averaged one a month for 65 years and were recorded in sealed files along with the church's responses — along with the findings of a 2015 public hearing.

The report found that the Jehovah's Witness organization's internal system for responding to complaints of child sexual abuse was not child or survivor focused, "in that it is presided over by males and offers a survivor little or no choice about how their complaint is addressed."

"The sanctions available within the organization's internal disciplinary system are weak and leave perpetrators of child sexual abuse at large in the organization and the community," the report also concluded.

The head of the Jehovah's Witness community's service desk, Rodney Spinks, told the [Sydney Morning Herald](#) the church is taking the royal commission's work seriously.

"We want to benefit from the process; everybody does," Spinks said.

The church's responses to sexual abuse allegations, and its desire to handle them internally, often mirror those

Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses have no paid clergy. Alleged perpetrators are mostly regular congregants, who are shielded from official prosecution by the church's code of moral conduct. The church's rules, which are based on a strict interpretation of the Bible, call for separation from other members of society, who are considered spiritually inferior.

Additionally, the Jehovah's Witnesses' responses to abuse allegations are not limited to Australia. The religion's parent organization, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, for 25 years has instructed its elders to keep cases of child sexual abuse secret from law enforcement and members of their own congregations, according to [an investigation from the Center for Investigative Reporting](#), which examined thousands of pages of documents in recent cases. In the last few years, the organization has been hit with an increasing number of lawsuits claiming it covered up child sexual abuse, according to the investigation.

The church's deep suspicion of outsiders is the reason sex abuse among Jehovah's Witnesses is rarely reported to authorities, according to Angus Stewart, a South African lawyer who led an investigation into the church, [The Post](#) reported.

The royal commission's report released Monday included two statements from women whose abuse complaints were handled by the Jehovah's Witness organization in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of these came from a woman who grew up on a farm in Western Australia and began associating with the organization when she was 10 years old.

During her teenage years, she often spent the night at the home of her friend's father, Bill Neill, who was an elder in the congregation and led weekly Bible studies at his family's house. At age 15 she began to be "groomed and sexually abused" by Neill. Despite the abuse, she said that she continued to respect Bill Neill and felt unable to disclose the abuse because of his position of authority in the congregation.

She first disclosed her abuse as an adult, while she was still a Jehovah's Witness. The elders who investigated her case required her to meet with Neill, and two elders, in her own home to discuss her allegations. Neill denied any intentional misconduct or deliberate touching on his part. Since there was no second witness to her abuse, and her alleged abuser did not confess, the elders concluded that there was not enough evidence to take judicial action against Neill, according to the commission's report. Following the investigation, Neill stepped down from his position as an elder in the congregation. But he remained at large in the congregation, "where he may have been a risk to other children," the report stated.

In a later recommendation to the local branch office, elders wrote that Neill could be reinstated as an elder "once this has died down" but expressed concern that there may also be "worldly people who also know" about the allegations. "Worldly" is a term used within the organization to refer to people who are not Jehovah's Witnesses and are therefore "not in the Truth."

This recommendation confirmed that the elders were "more concerned about the reputation of the congregation

At no point did the elders tell the woman that "she could, let alone that she should, report her abuse to the authorities," the report read. In requiring her to disclose her abuse before a group of men, in her own home, the elders caused her "significant distress" and trauma, the commission concluded. The elders should have taken further steps against Neill to protect other children from the "obvious risk" that he presented.

"The rigidity of reliance upon biblical text in the face of obvious danger to children was wrong," the report stated.

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Samantha Schmidt

Samantha Schmidt is a reporter covering gender and family issues. Follow 

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